

Rothman Meets with John Ging, UNRWA Director in Gaza

Receives updates on his initiatives to increase transparency and accountability at UNRWA

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(Washington, DC) - On Thursday, October 15, 2009, Congressman Rothman met with John Ging, Director of Operations in Gaza for the United National Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Mr. Ging updated Congressman Rothman on the work that UNRWA is conducting in Gaza as well as the status of several of Rothman's initiatives to increase transparency and accountability at the U.N. agency.

"While there is still much work to be done, we have come a long way in a small number of years. Because of our initiatives on the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on State, and Foreign Operations, as well as our work with the State Department and UNRWA officials, UNRWA has stepped up its compliance with U.S. law stating that no United States taxpayer dollars will go to fund terrorists," Rothman said.

"UNRWA has revamped its vetting processes and mechanisms, firing more than 100 employees over the past 10 years that have been found to violate US and U.N. policies regarding associating with Hamas or other terrorist groups. In addition, lists of UNRWA's employees and beneficiaries are now being crosschecked for terrorist connections by both the U.S. and Israel. I am encouraged by these improvements, but I will continue to make certain that not one cent of U.S. taxpayer dollars provided to UNRWA is redirected to terrorists, or to activities that support terror or promote a culture of hatred."

Rothman has been fighting for increased transparency and accountability at UNRWA since 2004. On January 28, 2009, he introduced a resolution (H.Con.Res. 29), which calls on UNRWA to publish online copies of all educational materials used in UNRWA-administered schools as well as implement terrorist name recognition software and other screening procedures that would help to ensure that UNRWA staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries are neither terrorists themselves, nor affiliated with known terrorist organizations. The bill has garnered 31 bipartisan cosponsors and is currently awaiting action before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

In addition, this past April, Rothman met with senior UNRWA officials in the West Bank while on a fact-finding trip to Israel, the West Bank, and Egypt. Rothman said: "At the meeting, it was apparent that the officials had a clear understanding of what the U.S. Congress expects. They were extremely concerned that we be satisfied that they were making a good-faith effort and had cleaned up enough to warrant the continuation of U.S. foreign aid." This sentiment was repeated during the meeting with Mr. Ging.

Mr. Ging repeated the numerous steps forward that UNRWA has taken on transparency and accountability, while also highlighting UNRWA's other successes such as its Summer Games program that he started in 2007. The Summer Games have drawn between 200,000 and 250,000 children each year to provide them with a series of recreational and educational activities. The games allow the children of Gaza to interact and play with each other in an educational setting, while drawing them away from the hazards of Gaza, such as fundamentalist camps run by Hamas aimed at recruiting children. The Hamas camps are estimated to have drawn approximately 16,000 children this past summer.

UNRWA is charged by the United Nations with the mission of providing services, including education, health, relief and social services to over 4.3 million registered Palestinians in the Middle East. Since 1950, the U.S. has contributed more than \$3.5 billion to UNRWA. The U.S. is the single largest monetary contributor to this U.N. agency.

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